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GUEST COMMUNION IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

by James H. Pearson

INTRODUCTION

What the Bishops Proposed

In 1952 the House of Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. made the following statement in connection with the licensing of limited intercommunion for ecumenical occasions:

"The Holy Communion is the most sacred action of the Church as the Body of Christ. In it the Church as a body indwelt by the Holy Spirit celebrates before the eternal Father the self-offering of Christ for us and to us. In it we believe that Christ is truly present, and those who receive Him by faith and join their self-offering with His receive His life and power. Just because this is a sacred action of such high meaning our own Church and many other Churches have sought to insure that those who celebrate Holy Communion do so with the authority of the body whose action it is, and that those who share in it are informed of its meaning and are responsibly committed to the faith and fellowship of the Church in whose life it is so central. . . We have sought, often imperfectly, to guard against uninformed and irresponsible participation by the requirement of instruction and Confirmation before the granting of regular communicant status."

Twelve years later, in St. Louis, the House of Bishops proposed the following resolution:

"Whereas, the House of Bishops believe the time has come when Christian Churches should recognize as a fundamental principle that all Christians duly baptized in the Name of the Holy Trinity and qualified to receive the Holy Communion in their own churches should be welcomed as guests at the Lord's Table in all Christian Churches, be it therefore,

"Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, that the General Convention accepts this principle, affirming the right of Bishops to apply it in their own jurisdictions; directs the standing Liturgical Commission to present to the 1967 Meeting of General Convention appropriate rubrical and other amendments to the Book of Common Prayer expressive of this principle; and requests the Committee on Constitution and Canons of the House of Bishops to present to the same meeting such constitutional and canonical changes as may be necessary fully to establish this principle in this Church; and be it further

"Resolved, the House of Deputies concurring, that in so altering our discipline, the General Convention intends to clarify and emphasize this Church's understanding of Confirmation as a response to and fulfillment of Holy Baptism and not a mere pre-requisite to the Holy Communion; to reaffirm our wish and prayer that this effectual Sign of the Gift of the Holy Spirit might be everywhere gladly accepted as a rightful part of the preparation and strengthening of every Christian for ministry; and to state plainly, once again, our solemn intention to press resolutely toward that Unity in Christ in which painful separations in the Church will be impossible."

Deputies Reject: Bishops Try Again

When this latter resolution came before the House of Deputies it was rejected by that body. A substitute resolution was sent back to the House of Bishops calling for a study by the Joint Commission on Ecumenical Relations, and while this failed of concurrence in the Upper House, the Bishops did in the end refer the matter to the Joint Commission on Ecumenical Relations on their own motion.

In consequence of all this, a degree of confusion exists through the length and breadth of the Church. For years some parts of the Church have been not only advocating but practicing open communion, and doing so in the sincere conviction that this is consonant with the mind of the Church and, more important, with the Will of Christ. Others, equally sincere, view such practice with profound disapproval, as tending to subvert good order in the Church.

Source of Bishops' Action

Almost certainly, the development of the attitude of the House of Bishops on this issue between 1952 and 1964 is explainable only in terms of the burgeoning of the ecumenical spirit in that period. The negotiations consequent upon the Blake-Pike proposal, the convening of the Second Vatican Council and countless other developments in inter-church cooperation have stamped in the minds of all churchmen a consciousness of the sin of schism, and have encouraged all of us to see the reunion of Christendom not as a far-off ideal but as a real possibility in our time.

We should do ill, however, to regard the relaxation of our discipline of Holy Communion only in the light of ecumenical expediency. There are complex issues of sacramental theology involved, and of dogmatic and moral theology as well - is-

issues which cannot be met simply by the appeal to charity on the one hand, or the appeal to historical precedent on the other. It is to be hoped that the Joint Commission will approach the matter in a restrained and scholarly way; but perhaps even more, that churchmen everywhere will take the trouble to inform themselves thoroughly on the issues, rather than assume a doctrinaire and unmoveable attitude from the outset.

We all have our prejudices, and the prejudice of this writer is frankly conservative. But recognition of our prejudices can go far in helping us to deal fairly with a question promising so much pain and vexation and at the same time so great a reward. "Come now, and let us reason together."

CHAPTER ONE - STATING THE QUESTION: "OPEN",

"CLOSED" OR "GUEST"?

The question of open or closed communion, and hence also the question of "guest communion", is and has long been most commonly stated as, "Who may properly receive the Sacrament of the Holy Communion?" There is a centuries-old precedent for this form of the question, and a conceptual framework for it reaching halfway around the world. It was, for example, in this form that the terms of the Jansenist - Port Royal controversy of 17th century France were cast. All the inclusions and exclusions of Roman Catholic discipline since before the Council of Trent assume it. All modern liberal protestant espousal of open communion is based on a broad reply to precisely this question; and almost all defenses of closed communion depend on the marshalling of arguments for a narrow reply to it.

In view of this almost universal consensus it may seem an impertinence to suggest that "Who may receive the Sacrament?" is not really the proper question at all. Nevertheless we do suggest it.

Our understanding of the Eucharist has undergone a series of violent changes over the past quarter-century or so. The old wrangles over transsubstantiation, real presence, substance, accidents and other staples of sacramental polemics have not been so much settled as they have been pushed aside as irrelevant. It is not necessary to recount how this revolution in thought has been brought about; but it will be well to point out briefly the fruits of the revolution which by now are, or ought to be, the common property of all informed Christians. There are two principle insights involved.

New Eucharistic Insights

First, and very important, we now see the Eucharist as a unity of action. When Dom Gregory Dix pointed out the four-fold aspect of liturgical action (offertory, consecration, fraction and communion) he forced us to consider the extent to which any of these four could be thought of as discrete. Our findings were inevitable; offertory cannot meaningfully be considered apart from consecration; the fraction is the inescapable prelude to communion, and so on. Consequently, our view of the eucharistic action is now unitary; it sweeps in a smooth parabola, each segment of which is necessary to the integrity of the others. The offering of self, the identification of such offering and oblation with the Sacrifice of Christ, the Father's acceptance of our oblations and His returning of them to us, transformed - these are the great themes of the eucharistic Sacrifice, and they are not separable one from another. The Eucharist is one.

Second, and scarcely less revolutionary, we have come to a new appreciation of the common priesthood of the Body of Christ - or, as it is more commonly known, the priesthood of all believers. More clearly now, we see the Holy Eucharist not as something performed for the people in the pews by a professional priesthood, but as the common work of the whole laos - the whole people of God. This in no way denies or displaces the ministerial priesthood, but rather places it in its proper perspective as a function of the Body of Christ.

How profound a change is represented in these two aspects of liturgical renewal is apparent in the contrast between them and the views they replace. Not many years ago non-communicating attendance at the Eucharist was positively encouraged in many of our parishes. The fore-Mass (or Ante-Communion) was frequently torn from its

proper context and used as a separate service; the Eucharist itself was usually regarded as no more than a necessary means of confecting or "manufacturing" the sacramental presence of our Lord.

Just as destructive of true liturgy was the prevailing subjective view of eucharistic piety. Communion was an intensely personal, private experience; one tried to ignore one's neighbors in the exclusively vertical relationship which Holy Communion was thought to effect. One said, "I am making my communion," and said it with proprietary emphasis. The service of Holy Communion in fact appeared to be the paramount and supreme occasion for private devotion, and was hardly, in any observable way, liturgy at all. Morning and Evening Prayer were truly common prayer; the Holy Communion was not.

The result was that, among Anglicans at least, the significant aspect of Holy Communion was the act of going forward to the altar rail and receiving the Sacrament. A person performing this act is a communicant by definition, and the crucial point involved in open or closed communion came to be the question of who has the right to perform this particular act.

"Communicants" or "Offerers"?

Such an attitude would have astonished our more remote ancestors. In the primitive Church Christians were not "communicants" but "offerers." The question was not "Who has the right to receive?" but "Who has the right to offer?" If the Eucharist is one, it would be an absurdity to receive without offering, or to offer without receiving. So conscious of this were the Christians of the first several centuries of the Church's life that even catechumens in their three-year course of preparation for baptism and confirmation were physically excluded from the place of the Eucharist before the offertory began. The whole - not just

part, but the whole - of the eucharistic liturgy is an exercise of the priesthood of all believers.

This being true, one may wonder how any believer can accurately be characterized as a "guest at the Lord's Table." Those who participate in the Eucharist do so not as guests, but as members of the household of faith - that is to say, by virtue of the fact that they are "in Christ", members of the Body, joint heirs of the Kingdom. None but Christ may offer the sacrifice of Christ, and none but members of His Body may enter into it eucharistically.

We often hear it proposed that, "It is the Lord's Table, not ours," And this is simply not true. Because it is the Lord's Table, and because we are made members of Him, it is our Table too. We are children in our Father's house.

For that matter, we cannot be entirely happy about the use of the word "privilege" in the Second Office of Instruction in the Prayer Book. By virtue of our Lord's command, "Do this in remembrance of me," we have, most importantly, the duty of participating in the Eucharist. Because we have this duty, we have also the right to perform it, for rights are always related to duties in this way. But privilege (privus lex) or private law implies a right apart from a duty, and it is hard to see how such a thing fits now with our view of the Eucharist.

We can proceed now to a consideration of how the initiation rites of Baptism and Confirmation bear upon the question of who has the duty and right of participation in the Holy Eucharist.

CHAPTER TWO - THE RELATION OF INITIATORY

rites to the Eucharistic Mystery

"CONFIRMATION"

In their statement of 1964, the House of Bishops say that they intend "to clarify and emphasize this Church's understanding of Confirmation as a response to and fulfillment of Holy Baptism and not a mere pre-requisite to the Holy Communion." This provides an excellent springboard for our present discussion.

Surely the Bishops are quite right when they imply that the Sacrament of Confirmation has very often in the past been regarded as a sort of "graduation exercise" which certifies the confirmand ready to participate in the Holy Communion. Not infrequently - perhaps inevitably in our circumstances - a large part of the confirmation instruction is devoted to preparing confirmands for Holy Communion. No particular value is placed on Confirmation itself in the popular mind, and that is of course a great pity. Whatever Confirmation is, it is more than a pre-eucharistic enabling act.

But what, precisely, is it? The whole matter of Christian initiation is at present under the most intense scrutiny by theologians. A number of new or rediscovered insights have been brought forth, and a number of tentative conclusions (widely divergent ones at that) have been offered, and the end is not in sight. There is just very little agreement among theologians on the subject of Christian Initiation; and it may therefore be much too early to state the Church's understanding of it. One thing is certain: Any definition of Confirmation at this point by General Convention is bound to be objected to strongly in one quarter or another. And this has very practical consequences.

The Bishops' understanding of Confirmation as "response and fulfillment of Holy Baptism" and "part of the preparation and strengthening of (the) Christian for ministry" is an old and respectable view, but many modern scholars are finding it hopelessly inadequate. Gregory Dix, for example, traces this view back through Peter Lombard to the False Decretals of Gratian, and finds no evidence of it at all in the primitive Church, where what we call Confirmation was "sealing in the Spirit unto the Day of Redemption," and purely eschatological in its implications.

In other quarters we find Confirmation being emphasized as an ordination to the priesthood of believers; in still others as a baptism of the Spirit at least equal in importance to baptism in water. Indeed, H. V. Martin of the Church of South India rather astonishingly asserts, "There is not a shred of evidence in the New Testament that water-baptism was essential to joining the Apostolic Church. Baptism in the Apostolic Church was primarily and fundamentally Baptism in the Spirit."

We have not the space here for a comprehensive survey of the findings of theologians. Let us then turn our attention to the view of Confirmation expressed in the Bishops' resolution, reserving judgment, however, as to whether that view is adequate or will prevail as expressive of the mind of the Church.

The cleavage between Baptism and Confirmation which is peculiar to Western Christianity had, by the ninth century, forced a referral to Holy Scripture for an answer to the question of what it is that Confirmation accomplishes that was, by implication, left undone at Baptism. The answer was found in the eighth chapter of the Book of Acts, which describes the Apostolic Laying on of Hands conveying the gift of the Holy Spirit. This benefit was elaborated into a Seven-fold Gift of the

Spirit, which in turn has been corrupted at the popular level and rendered as "the granting of seven virtues to the confirmand."

Gift of the Holy Spirit

This, of course, will not do. The grace of Confirmation is "the Gift of the Spirit," tout court; and the seven-fold nature of the Gift only explains intent and direction. Now the Holy Spirit is given to us, through the laying on of hands, for the doing of a work; He, the third Person of the divine Trinity, accomplishes through us, in the world, the will of the Father expressed in the Logos, His Son.

Is the Holy Spirit not given, then, in Baptism? Theologians differ radically on this point. In our rite of Baptism the Holy Spirit is twice invoked:

- 1) Give thy Holy Ghost to this child that he may be born again and be made an heir of everlasting salvation . . .
- 2) Sanctify him with thy Holy Ghost.

In both these cases the work of the Holy Spirit is directed toward the great dominant theme of Baptism - death unto sin and rebirth unto righteousness, but not toward the working of Christ's will in the world through the newly-baptised. In Confirmation, by contrast, we find the words, "Strengthen them, we beseech thee, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost, the Comforter." Surely we are justified in taking this to imply "strengthen for service." Or, in the words of the Bishops' resolution, the preparation and strengthening of every Christian for ministry.

The purpose, then, of Confirmation is, in theological terms, the conveying of gratia gratis data, given for the ministry of grace, rather

than gratia gratum faciens, given to make the minister worthy. As expressed by Rabanus Maurus, the Spirit is given "that the recipient may be strengthened to preach to others the gift which he has himself received in Baptism."

Christian Responsibility and the Eucharist

What is the ministry of Christians? To bear witness to the saving death and resurrection of Christ. To proclaim this good news in every generation in all corners of the world, until He shall come again with glory to judge both the Quick and the dead. This is our ministry, and the principle way in which it is carried out is the Holy Eucharist. For St. Paul tells us clearly, unforgettably, in I Cor. 11, "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He Come."

What a pity it is that Christians of all persuasions and allegiances did not more carefully consider this Scriptural passage in the last several hundred years! Our common fault has been to regard the Holy Eucharist as a kind of fuel depot to which we can repair in order to take in the supply of holiness and ghostly strength sufficient to see us through a few days (or weeks) in the evil world and to ensure our survival. We have thought of the Eucharist as a field hospital, too, to which the wounded come to have their spiritual lesions closed before going out to receive more injuries in battle. Or as an armory where we may equip ourselves with arms and ammunition to fight the world, the flesh and the devil howling outside the church walls.

The Eucharist can be none of these. The Eucharist is evangelism, the supreme evangelism of the Church: "Ye do show the Lord's death till He come." In speaking to Pilate our Lord said, "To this end was I born, and for this

cause same I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth." And equally can the Church as the extension of the Incarnation, apply these words to herself: In each Eucharist she is born and comes into the world bearing witness to the truth; not as fuel depot or field hospital or armory, but as the energy of the Holy Ghost, sanctifying all things, all life.

"Preparation and strengthening of every Christian for ministry." Yes; above all, for the eucharistic ministry of the Body and Blood of Christ. Those who think of the Church's mission as an exercise in public relations aimed at enclosing ever broader areas of the earth's population within an ecclesiastical boundary cannot understand this, nor can those who regard the Eucharist as an adjunct of the quartermaster corps of the Church. So we must insist again and again that the Eucharist is the living witness of the Gospel, actualizing the Sacrifice of Christ among us and sanctifying time and space by a re-ordering of all life. It is the celebration and realization of the Kingdom. It is the Church at work in the world.

For this work the individual Christian is prepared first by Baptism which brings him, through a death and resurrection experience, to new life within the Body of Christ; second, by Confirmation, which prepares him, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, to take his place and so his work in the eucharistic witness of the Church.

Communion and the Unconfirmed

The question we must ask now is, on the basis of this understanding of the Eucharist and of Confirmation, can the unconfirmed participate in the Eucharist? This obviously puts us in something of a dilemma, for if the answer is yes, we can only draw the conclusion that while Confirmation may be "part of the preparation and

strengthening of (the) Christian for ministry", it is a part that can be freely left out; is, in other words a spiritual luxury. On the other hand, if the answer is no, we Episcopalians are in a most peculiar position, for we alone among Western Churches require Confirmation before admission to the Holy Communion. Probably we do not, as a Church, want to say either of these things just now.

At the risk of being repetitious, it should, however, be pointed out that the view of Confirmation outlined above may very well not be adequate or even substantially correct. If it is not - or if a substantial number of Church people believe it is not - we might do well to find out what the correct view is. This will involve a great deal of research and debate, and probably a fair amount of frustration too, but it is infinitely preferable either to relegating Confirmation to the ecclesiastical attic, or to continuing to base our practice on a rubric that may or may not have a firm theological underpinning, but, like Mount Everest, "is there".

Nevertheless, one thing is gained by this discussion, and it may turn out to be significant: Confirmation may indeed not be "a mere prerequisite to the Holy Communion", but this is a long way from saying that it has no close or important connection with the Holy Communion. If the Eucharist is the supreme Evangelical ministry of the Church, then Confirmation on its most limited showing as strengthening for ministry is firmly locked to it. The only question, then, is how.

CHAPTER THREE - DISCIPLINE AND "GUEST"

COMMUNION

We can now turn our attention to some of the more practical aspects of the controversy, and important among these is the question of discipline.

From the earliest times there has been a discipline exercised in connection with the Holy Eucharist. St. Paul was very much concerned about it, and wrote passionately on the subject to his far-off flocks. In sub-apostolic times and later, offenses against morality were punished by excommunication, and differences in belief frequently resulted in mutual excommunication of bishops and whole dioceses. The assumption of the existence of eucharistic discipline is in fact one pervasive constant of the whole of Christian history, and one can discern it as easily in Geneva and Canterbury as in Rome and Constantinople.

It is somewhat surprising then to note the degree to which it has been abandoned in recent times. We may note three important causes which, among others, have contributed to this decline:

- 1) The breakdown of the machinery of penitential discipline. When the very processes by which excommunication and restoration are effected become practically unworkable, the whole idea of discipline is likely to collapse.
- 2) The tendency toward subjectivization. If Holy Communion is regarded as almost exclusively a vertical relationship, the conditions for it have logically to be worked out within that relationship, the "outsider" has little to say to it.

- 3) The influence of anti-intellectual attitudes. To very many Christians, any consideration beyond plain generosity with the Sacrament is simply incomprehensible.

We have still in the Book of Common Prayer, however, several items of eucharistic discipline which ought here to be noted. Some involve the direct imposition of conditions; others are disciplinary only by implication.

- 1) Recitation of the Nicene Creed. While the creed may, by rubric, be omitted if it has been said immediately before in Morning Prayer, it must be used on Christmas, Easter, Ascension and Whitsunday, as well as on Trinity Sunday. It would seem, if we accept a unitary view of the Eucharist, that assent to the Nicene Creed is a condition of participation in the Holy Communion.
- 2) The Invitation ("Ye who do truly and earnestly repent...") Here are expressed three more conditions: repentance for sin, charitable relations with men, and the intention of obeying God's commandments.
- 3) The repulsion rubric. This is the provision for public excommunication of the "open and notorious evil liver" and for the restoration of the same to communicant status.
- 4) The rubric following, which provides for the excommunication of parties "betwixt whom hatred and malice reign," and for their restoration.
- 5) The Second Office of Instruction, in

which the question is asked, "After you have been confirmed, what great privilege doth our Lord provide for you?" Answer: "Our Lord provides the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion for the continual strengthening and refreshing of my soul."

- 6) The Confirmation rubric, at the end of the Order of Confirmation: "And there shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion, until such time as he be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed."

These are the main disciplinary provisions. One has to do with orthodoxy of belief, three with the moral state, and two with sacramental preparation and qualification. It is not our intention here to argue for or against any of these conditions; they are adduced only to clarify our present situation. From their presence in the Book of Common Prayer we can draw two conclusions.

First, that according to present formularies, the Episcopal Church does have a eucharistic discipline; that is, she does impose conditions for participating in the Holy Eucharist.

Second, that while some conditions for participation can only be met in the secrecy of the human heart (e.g., sincerity in profession of faith or confession of sin) others belong in the external forum and are to be enforced by ecclesiastical authority. This second observation is the one likely to raise hackles and provoke dispute. The objection is made that only the Lord Himself ought to judge who shall come to His Table, but this argument overlooks the fact that the ministerial priesthood is not simply a mechanical function. The ordained clergy are "stewards of the mysteries of Christ," and in a steward "it is necessary that

he be found faithful." This is amply reflected in the promises made at the ordination of a priest: "Will you then give your faithful diligence always so to minister the Doctrine and Sacraments, and the Discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded, and as this Church hath received the same...?" Answer: "I will so do, by the help of the Lord."

In addition to the provisions of the Book of Common Prayer, the Episcopal Church further defines her eucharistic discipline in her Constitution and Canons, the body of law for the government of the Church. There is the definition of a communicant, a canonical provision to back up the repulsion rubric mentioned above, and a canon dealing with the eligibility for the sacraments of persons married "otherwise than as this Church provides." Succeeding canons describe the provisions of the Church for Holy Matrimony.

But eucharistic discipline does not stop with "Regulations Respecting the Laity." Laymen participate in the Eucharist in a manner consonant with their order, and clergy in a manner consonant with theirs. It is interesting to note that while regulation of the laity is expressed in only three canons, the regulation of the clergy requires forty-one! And here is involved something very seldom considered, but absolutely essential to a balanced view of discipline: the discipline of the clergy and laity alike is ordered to a single end - that the witness of the Church shall be rendered in a manner pleasing to God and faithful to His revelation of Himself.

Clerical and Lay Regulations

Too often the canons regulating the clergy are regarded as the defensive hedges built around a professional caste. We must therefore insist that the idea of the Body of Christ as divided

between professionals and non-professionals is inimical to the Spirit of Christ and is profoundly dangerous. There are different orders in the Church because there are various functions, but the Body itself is not and cannot be divided.

The consequence of this is immediately apparent in our present discussion. It is a gross anomaly for any national Church (or for any individual Christian, for that matter) to be militantly concerned about the validity of its clerical orders and entirely unconcerned about the regularity of its lay order. The Apostolic Succession, so dear to Anglican hearts, can never represent more than a part of real Church order; indeed, apart from the ordering of the Church as a whole, it means virtually nothing. As long as the laity remain a great, gray, untheological mass - acted upon but not acting - so long will the witness of the Church be an ineffectual simpering in the eyes of the world.

We began by speaking of eucharistic discipline, but we discover that it is inextricably bound up with other disciplines of the Church - that of marriage, that of Baptism, for example. And we are obliged to consider what course the Church ought to be steering with regard to all of them. We know that the liberal denominations have all but completely given up any kind of discipline, regarding their function as advisory, and providing information, inspiration, counsel and fellowship. There are many who believe we should do likewise.

Will "Guest" Communion Remove Discipline?

We cannot deal here with so far-reaching a question. But we have to ask ourselves, on a much more limited and utilitarian level, whether any discipline can be maintained if the principle of guest communion is adopted and put into practice.

The Bishops' 1964 statement speaks of "altering our discipline": But is it really alteration which is proposed here, or abandonment?

Can we really retain and exercise discipline within the Episcopal Church and at the same time encourage guest communion? We should certainly have to face the fact that we cannot impose any part of our discipline on non-Episcopalians who appear at our altar rails. True, a limitation is expressed in the provision, "duly baptised in the Name of the Holy Trinity and qualified . . . in their own churches." But how, one wonders, is this provision to be enforced? Can anyone suppose that it would be taken with any great seriousness?

A still graver question arises from this. If but one restriction be imposed upon our "guests"- and that unenforceable - what effect can we expect to observe in our own people? Shall we, for example, withhold the Sacrament from Episcopalians who have married "otherwise than as this Church provides" while administering it freely to people of other denominations who have married in exactly the same way? Shall we withhold it from persons contemplating or preparing for Confirmation in the Episcopal Church while administering it to people who have no intention of being confirmed? Finally, would any priest ever repel the "open and notorious evil liver" in such a situation? The rubric enjoining such repulsion is even now little exercised, and that may be all to the good, but it is certain that open communion or guest communion would make it a completely dead letter.

It was implied above that the discipline of the clergy and of the laity ought not to be considered separately because they are ordered to a single end. It must then also be asked whether the discipline of the clergy would not be affected by this proposed change. As a matter of pure

principle, if a layman of another allegiance is free to exercise his liturgy at our altars, how can we in conscience refuse to allow a clergyman to exercise his? To try to do so would involve us in an indefensible inconsistency. And we ought always to remember that, as no Church can exercise discipline over its laity through an undisciplined clergy, so also no Church can maintain a disciplined clergy when the lay order is exempt from discipline.

It is possible - barely possible - that the abandonment of all discipline is precisely what the Church ought to press for. But ought we not to be as clear as possible about what the consequences are likely to be?

CHAPTER FOUR - WILL "GUEST" COMMUNION

SET FORWARD ECUMENICITY?

In our Introduction we stated that the House of Bishops' 1964 proposal was almost surely prompted by the progress of the ecumenical movement over the past several years. It will be well, then, for us to consider the question of open (or "guest") communion in that light.

The efforts of the Episcopal Church in the field of ecumenical relations long antedate the current series of unity discussions. Concordats of intercommunion with the Polish National Catholic Church and the Old Catholic Church have been in effect for decades. And more recently, concordats have been signed providing for intercommunion with the Philippine Independent Church, the Spanish Reformed Church, and the Lusitanian Reformed Church.

In each of these cases there was a long

period of study and conference before agreement was reached. Both sides had to satisfy themselves that there existed a common understanding of the Faith and a discipline and practice reflective of that understanding. In view of cultural and linguistic barriers this was by no means an easy process. And, of course, in no case could we enter into such a relationship with another Church without first having secured the approval of those bodies with which we were already in communion.

There can be hardly any question that this traditional approach to ecumenical relations would have to be substantially modified in the event of adoption of the open communion principle. In concrete terms, the fruit of our encounter with the bodies mentioned above is the agreement whereby we may join in eucharistic worship with them, and they with us. We are "in communion" with them. With whom, then, should we be in communion under the terms of the Bishops' proposal of 1964? Let us explore this question.

The ultimate end and purpose of the efforts toward Church unity is compliance with the Will of Christ, Who prayed "that they all may be one." This unity implies a full and free fellowship in which denominational identities have disappeared and racial and cultural barriers have ceased to divide the seamless robe of our Lord. About this there is no argument. It is only when we approach the immediate and external aspects of unification that opinion comes to be divided. Internal unity will, in this sinful world, always be a matter of more or less, since the tares must grow up with the wheat until the final reaping.

Even with respect to the external signs of unity there is this much agreement: the focus of attention is and must be the Lord's Table. The Holy Eucharist is the Sacrament of Unity; if we are together here we are truly together, but if

we are not, then no amount of talk, of friendly relations or joint ventures - however admirable - will avail us. The question before us, then, is not whether our altars shall be opened, but how.

We are not concerned here with ecclesiastical merger similar to mergers between railroads or manufacturing concerns. It is true, such mergers present enormous advantages: the body resulting from the merger is larger and proportionately more influential than were its constituents; buildings, work programs, personnel, training facilities and all the rest can be more efficiently and economically employed. But such considerations are irrelevant to our main purpose, which is communion, or common union in the Body of Christ.

Two Ways To Union

There are two principle ways of achieving this common union, and both have their precedents. One is to declare it by fiat, and the other is to approach it by means of dialogue. This truly is the watershed of the controversy about guest communion.

In terms of speed and simplicity, there can be no question that declaring our altars open by action of General Convention would be much quicker and easier. A great deal of red tape could be cut, and much theological haggling avoided; we say it is so, and it is so. By contrast, the other approach presupposes that the interested bodies both officially and informally seek to understand each other on the deepest issues, trying to represent their own particular genius and history in clear terms. They are required to acknowledge their weaknesses and shortcomings and to be generous in conceding the worth of traditions not their own. Above all, they laboriously sort out and identify the real issues which cry out for resolution, as contrasted with the stereotypes which may never have reflected reality or which have been negated long since.

The consulting bodies involved in such a dialogue may have to face the fact that no resolution of differences is forthcoming at a given time, in which case they can only wait upon the eventual illumination of history. But if no such impasse occurs, they proceed to theological agreement, and when theological agreement is secure - when both parties find themselves to be one in the faith - communion is the next and final step.

Perhaps the one thing about ecumenical encounter which most disquiets a great many thoughtful churchmen is the risk of committing ourselves prematurely in such a way that we will be forced to surrender what we consider essential articles of faith and order. For many decades the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, on the basis of which all Anglican unity discussions have been conducted, has served as a sturdy bulwark against that risk, laying down as a minimum area of agreement our four-fold rule of faith. It is not unreasonable to hold that the principle of open communion bypasses the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral by proclaiming a unity in the faith which does not in fact exist.

"Guest" Communion May Hinder Unity

It will be asserted, and with some justice, that even under open communion we can still press for theological agreement and for church order answerable to the terms of the Quadrilateral, and that in any case, a policy of guest communion does not imply full organic union, since it commits us only to occasional acts of hospitality.

In answering the first of these arguments, it must be said that while a developing theological consensus under such conditions is far from impossible, there are two forces which militate strongly against it. One is simple convenience. There is a real and forceful tendency, once intercommunion is established, to push aside theological

issues and questions as intrusions on the peace of the church and as distractions from what one element or another considers to be the paramount and pressing program and work of the church. In support of this may be cited the case of our relations with the Polish National Catholic Church. A broad area of theological agreement was defined at the time of the intercommunion concordat; and that is fortunate, because almost no progress has been made since that time in reconciling the many disparities of belief and practice which then existed and consequently still exist. Since intercommunion does exist, there is simply no practical, compelling reason to face these issues. For that matter, we see very little dialogue within the Episcopal Church aimed at resolving the theological tensions which underlie her unrest.

Equally strong is the tendency to allow the growing-together process to base itself not on the persuasion of the Holy Spirit but on an enormous indifference to the terms of the Gospel and to the facts of a long and often bitter history. For many, it is simply not possible to be very optimistic about this. We have to hope that the Spirit can and will bring order out of our chaos, but we have also to enlist intellect and will in the service of that hope, to appraise realistically the theological gulf which separates us from one another, and to do so unhampered by the realization that what we are ultimately seeking is already a fait accompli.

No "Guests" At the Lord's Table

With regard to the second argument, that no more than occasional acts of hospitality are here involved, it is probably not true that the statistical frequency of acts of communion is truly relevant. It would be more true to the Gospel, in fact, for us to hope that if the principle is

established and is right, acts of communion would be very frequent indeed. To argue otherwise is almost to say, There is something a little wrong about this, but don't worry: it won't happen very often! And we ought not to be saying anything like that.

But in any case, it is not hospitality we are speaking of. As has been pointed out above, there are no guests at the Lord's Table - only members of the household of faith. In view of this, there can never be a question of our welcoming or not welcoming anybody to our altars: only the question of their right to be there.

CHAPTER FIVE - THE APPEAL TO CHARITY

Perhaps the strongest (certainly the most frequently cited) argument in favor of open or guest communion is the appeal to charity. It is an argument which cannot be met by a resort to legalism or historical precedent, for laws can be changed and precedents can be overturned; it must be met on its own terms.

In general, the appeal to charity is made as follows: God gives His gifts to men freely and superabundantly. There can never be a question of our deserving or earning His gifts, for we already owe our absolute obedience to Him. As Creator He gives us our very being, and as Redeemer our salvation. His graciousness is visibly expressed to us in the Holy Communion wherein we receive the Body and Blood of Christ under the forms of bread and wine. "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Since it is God's will to give Himself freely to His people, how can we in charity interrupt that gift by refusing to share it with others? Open communion, then, represents

the exercise of charity, of response to the love of God. Closed communion is selfishness, uncharitably cutting off the divine gift from those who have as great need of it as we ourselves.

This is the appeal, and it is a tremendously compelling one. Replies to it have taken many forms over the years - the irrelevance of charity in this context, the priority of the demands of justice and even - may God forgive us! - the quoting of our Lord's words about casting pearls before swine. None of these has been conclusive or even in a limited way convincing. Perhaps that is because the claim of charity is itself so strong.

Two Expressions of Charity

Charity toward our fellow man is expressed in two ways: benevolence and beneficence. That is to say, we wish for our neighbor such things as are conducive to his well-being, and we do for him such acts as tend toward his well-being. These are the inside and the outside aspects of charity, the act proceeding from the wish.

Our benevolence may be either general or particular: i.e., we may hope in a general way that all goes well with this or that person, or we may more particularly desire that he have enough to eat. But the exterior manifestation of charity is always particular, always concrete, and we know that particular acts may very easily have consequences widely at variance with the motive impelling them. It is therefore necessary that we exercise judgment concerning what is really conducive to our neighbor's well-being. The phrase "He meant well" always has a sad sound.

The exercise of such judgment can be a terrible responsibility. Obviously, we do not give sharp knives to children just because they want them. But the judgment is not always so easy to

make. Is it really an act of charity to allow a teenager the use of the family car? to give a dollar to a beggar? to pretend not to notice the lies of a friend? The teenager may end in a fatal accident, the beggar may spend the dollar on muscatel, the friend may be encouraged in his mendaciousness. Or they may not. We may seek advice from others or we may temporize, but the responsibility is ours and there is no way for us to avoid it.

In regard to spiritual gifts mediated by the Church, the situation is at bottom the same. Gifts good in themselves may or may not be conducive to well-being in a given case because of the disposition of the recipient or because of other circumstances. Two illustrations will make this clear.

There has been much disquiet of late among the English clergy over the casual administration of the Sacrament of Baptism. In the Established Church, much more than on this side of the Atlantic, a most troublesome problem of conscience arises when circumstances plainly exist pointing to the certainty that the child to be baptised will not be reared as a Christian, will not be brought to instruction and Confirmation, will in fact lead a life in no way related to the baptism he has received. A number of solutions have been proposed, including the institution of a "service of dedication" which might be used in such cases instead of baptism. Whatever solution is ultimately agreed upon, the principle underlying the problem is clear: the grace of Baptism does not automatically produce well-being, and therefore should not be indiscriminately administered.

Again, it is specifically written into the canons of the Episcopal Church that "it shall be within the discretion of any Minister of this Church to decline to solemnize any marriage." Obviously, this provision is not made for the

purpose of allowing ministers scope for capriciousness, but rather because a priest may very easily be privy to information concerning a proposed marriage which convinces him that a sacramental union of man and wife either is not possible or is not intended. In such a case the urging of charity will prompt him not to officiate. And not only because of possible scandal but because the grace of holy matrimony does not automatically produce well-being in a couple, and cannot overrule a contrary intention.

In both instances the obligation of charity is two-fold: to protect the sacrament itself so that Christians may generally honor it and hold it in esteem; and to protect the parties immediately involved from dishonoring the sacrament either wittingly or unwittingly.

Now this is significant: Those who wilfully, knowingly abuse God's gifts have a heavy burden of guilt to bear; and those who receive His sacramental gifts in ignorance bear a burden of obligation which they do not understand and therefore cannot discharge. The graces given by God in both Baptism and Matrimony are great and good in themselves, but inappropriately administered they may be the occasion of great harm as well to the Church as to the recipients themselves.

Communion and Magic

There is nothing magical about the sacraments. They cannot make an evil man good or a good man better apart from his will and disposition. It is for this reason that St. Paul's terrible warning is given to us: "Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damna-

tion to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

No one would claim that all Episcopalians are worthy recipients of the Holy Communion: nor need we suppose that all non-Episcopalians who might present themselves at our altar rails, if open communion were to prevail, are unworthy. What is assumed is that the Episcopalian has heard the teaching of the Church and has given assent to it, and that he knows or has reason to know what the Holy Communion is. None of this can safely be assumed of the non-churchman.

Distinguishing on this basis is bound to be objected to as arbitrary. To be sure, it is arbitrary; so are all the sacramental regulations of the Church; so, certainly is a flat requirement of baptism and qualification to receive in one's own church in order to receive the Holy Communion in ours. Arbitrary, because we cannot know what God may have done or may do with any human soul. He is not bound to restrict His giving of gifts to the sacramental system, and He may very well grant the grace of baptism where sacramental baptism has been neglected or denied. He may give Himself to many quite apart from Holy Communion. But though He is not bound, we are; and when we speak of the sacraments or make judgments concerning their bestowal and use, we do so within the sacramental context. There's a wideness in God's mercy; but there is a narrowness in its sacramental expression. There has to be, or we make a nonsense of the sacraments, and there is no charity in that.

CONCLUSION

All the elements of controversy touched upon in the foregoing chapters must be given their full weight in the process of solving the enormously complex problem of open or guest communion. But one more observation should be made to place them in proper perspective and to provide an over-view of the conflict. It is this:

Both open communion and closed communion are, in terms of the ultimate prospects and hopes of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, anomalous. When Christ's prayer for the unity of His people is fulfilled, there will be no policy of inclusion or exclusion on a denominational or confessional basis. There will be no intercommunion, closed or open communion, guest communion or anything of the sort - only communion, for that is the meaning of the prayer, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."

That we are now asked to choose between one modus and another is a consequence and symbol of the grievous sin of schism, and we should not for a moment suppose that either policy is ultimately reflective of God's Will for His Church. Closed communion provokes bitterness and encourages the suspicion that the denomination holding to it regards others as moral inferiors. Open communion is destructive of the type of discipline necessary for any society to be itself, and raises fears of doctrinal indifference.

It is hard to say to what extent these suspicions and fears on both sides have reality. But they do exist, and it will be the task of all participants in the controversy to allay, so far as they can, the misgivings which either

point of view must prompt.

It is always painful to have to re-examine one's basic presuppositions, and because of this the course of the controversy will bring pain to many, even where the dictates of courtesy are most scrupulously observed. This cannot be helped. But there is a great gain to be had, too. Here is a magnificent opportunity for our growth in understanding both of ourselves and of God's Will for us. We live in an age where anything bearing the label "controversial" is shied away from as dangerous, disruptive, undesirable. This is a pity, for we Christians, of all people, should be aware that the time-tested basics of the Faith as embodied in the creeds were all hammered out on the anvil of controversy. Controversy can be among the most truly creative of social and intellectual processes, and if undertaken without malice, need hurt no more than most things.

There are really only two dangers facing us in this: Either that we may be so militantly partisan that we do not hear what others are saying to us, or that we may be so theologically limp that we do not take the trouble to examine the issues.

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